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New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 59

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Draft resolution (A/52/L.7)

Amendment (A/52/L.47)

The President: I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that two proposals have so far been submitted under the agenda item 59 of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, entitled "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". They are draft resolution A/52/L.7 and the amendments to it contained in document A/52/L.47.

As we are opening the debate on agenda item 59, I would like to reconfirm my understanding that the General Assembly will not be taking any decision on this item at this stage of its consideration, in accordance with the assurances that I have received to this effect.

Referring to my consultations with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, I would also like to advise the Assembly that there is no requirement for proposals submitted under a particular agenda item to be introduced at the beginning of the consideration of that item by the Assembly. In accordance with the established practices of the General Assembly, proposals submitted under a particular agenda item are introduced by their sponsors prior to the General Assembly's proceeding to take a decision on them.

In view of these considerations, it is my understanding that the statements made by Member States in the course of the debate on agenda item 59, without prejudice to their substance, should not be considered formal introductions of the proposals.

It is also my understanding that the introductions of the proposals under this agenda item, if and when they take place, will be in the order they were submitted, in accordance with, *inter alia*, rules 78, 90 and 91 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

We shall now proceed with the debate on this agenda item.

Mr. Kausikan (Singapore): Our discussions on Security Council reform over the last four years have resulted in two clear, if somewhat contradictory, conclusions. First, there is little doubt that the majority of Member States consider the current composition and working methods of the Security Council archaic and unsatisfactory. Secondly, it is, unfortunately, equally clear that, notwithstanding this widely held view, there are few prospects for early progress. The key difficulties arise from the many contradictions and ambiguities in the positions that the current permanent members have taken

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on Security Council reform; and, of course, the Charter gives them a decisive influence.

My delegation has on a number of previous occasions publicly analysed these contradictions and ambiguities. I will not repeat in detail what we have already exposed. I refer members to my delegation's statements in the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform of 5 and 9 May and most recently to my Minister's statement in this Hall on 29 September.

A central issue is the failure of the current permanent members to clearly pronounce themselves on whether a new permanent member, be it from an industrialized or a developing country, should have the veto. The power of a new permanent member is not a question that can be deferred to a later date merely to make it easier to select new permanent members. This is because the powers of the new permanent members are intrinsic to the very notion and definition of permanent membership.

We did not expect answers to the questions that we posed, and we have not received any satisfactory answer. We are not particularly disappointed. Resolving the ambiguities is not just a matter of negotiating a text in a working group. It is not just a question of clever drafting or diplomatic ingenuity to paper over differences. The ambiguities reflect profound geopolitical uncertainties that can be settled only over time by events in the real world, and not in any working group.

This ought to be obvious if we consider the origins of the current permanent membership. The countries that are permanent members were the victors of the Second World War. They gave themselves the privilege of the veto because they were then so essential to the maintenance of international peace and security that they had to be reassured that they could not be compelled to take any action that could lead to conflicts among themselves. This would have broken up the United Nations.

At the end of the Second World War, it was relatively easy to determine the identity of these powerful few. With most of the world in ruins after a long and devastating conflict, it was easy to discern the winners and losers. It was logical that the victors should bear the primary responsibility for maintaining the new international order. In any case, there was no choice. No one else was in a position to successfully argue against their claims. Their status as permanent members reflected the compelling geopolitical realities of the day.

Nevertheless, even then two of the three big victors — the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom — were sceptical of Roosevelt's view of China's ability to play a major role in the post-war world, and Churchill's insistence on including France among the elite group met with similar scepticism from Roosevelt and Stalin. It should not therefore surprise us that we now run into even greater difficulties in trying to decide who belongs in the new elite.

The end of the cold war took everybody by surprise. Its resolution was far from clear-cut. The end of the cold war has precipitated a period of transition and uncertainty. We are still debating the consequences because we are still living through them. It is of course obvious that the world has changed, but this does not in itself prescribe any particular new geopolitical configuration. The power structure of the post-cold-war international order is still evolving. The outcome of this process cannot as yet be predicted. The United Nations, as an Organization of sovereign States, must necessarily reflect international reality more than shape it, whatever else some may pretend to believe. But even this incontrovertible fact provides no practical guidance for our discussions on Security Council reform.

If the purpose of Security Council reform is to more accurately reflect the post-cold-war world, then, logically, there should now be only one permanent member. Only the United States now disposes of the political, military and economic clout on the global scale needed to maintain international peace and security. But, of course, it is politically unacceptable to have only one permanent member. And even the United States, in its post-cold-war mood of introspection, faces domestic political difficulties in exercising its undoubted capabilities. The Administration's failure to persuade Congress to pay its arrears to the United Nations is but one small symptom.

Even a cursory examination of the current situation of the other permanent members may lead us to wonder what real meaning permanent membership has in the contemporary situation of geopolitical flux and uncertainty. Russia's main preoccupations are internal, and understandably so. Given the serious problems that it is grappling with, Russia has neither the capability nor the desire to consistently exercise power on a global scale as the Soviet Union did. Russia will certainly rise again, but it will be a different Russia with global interests and relationships different from those of the Soviet Union.

China is already a rising Power, but it is still primarily a regional Power. In per capita terms it will be a poor country well into the next century. Its focus is on economic development and resolving urgent internal problems. Its primary international interest for many years to come will be to secure peace and stability around its immediate borders so that it can continue to grow and deal with its internal problems. It will not be as deeply engaged elsewhere.

The United Kingdom and France are now European Powers with at best only residual global influence and limited clout outside the European Union. The sad recent history of Bosnia demonstrated that even the most powerful European States were not capable of settling a European problem by themselves. It was the intervention of the United States that proved decisive, and the United States chose the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), not the United Nations Security Council, as the vehicle for its intervention.

It is clear that most of the current permanent members no longer have the will or the capability to exercise power on the global scale necessary to maintain international peace and security as envisaged by the Charter. It is a geopolitical reality that in present times several current permanent members are not permanent members because they are great Powers or global Powers in the traditional sense of these terms. By a reversal of logic, if they currently enjoy the status of a great or a global Power, it is primarily because they are already permanent members.

Before I am drowned out by howls of protest, let me hastily make my position clear. I am not suggesting that Security Council reform requires that any current permanent member be relegated to the common herd. Of course, the consequences of such a suggestion are too horrifying to contemplate, especially for the countries that will be directly affected. So let it be placed on the record that I accept and respect the historical fait accompli, even if its logic is no longer compelling. I recognize the useful and constructive roles that many current permanent members continue to play in international affairs. And even if these are not the roles for which they were originally given permanent status, they deserve our appreciation.

My point is simply that these are different roles. These are no longer unique roles that no other country is capable of assuming. Several other Members of the United Nations already play similar roles without any ambition of elevation to permanent status.

Perhaps our discussion on Security Council reform would progress a little better if we temporarily abandon futile arguments over number and identity for a more fundamental re-examination of the meaning of permanent membership in the last years of the twentieth century. Let us examine what is really needed to maintain international peace and security in the twenty-first century. This is why my delegation had suggested, as early as the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly four years ago, that our discussions on Security Council reform should begin with an examination of the criteria for permanent membership. We are encouraged that several other delegations appear to be coming around to this view.

Our essential point can be stated simply. A reformed Security Council must reflect the post-cold-war geopolitical configuration if it is to be effective. The crucial decisions that will affect this geopolitical configuration are not going to be made in New York, or even in London, Paris, Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin or Tokyo. It is not even clear that the geopolitical configuration can be shaped by a conscious and planned process of decision-making. The post-cold-war geopolitical configuration is going to emerge only gradually, over time, through the interactions of different countries in different regions of the world. It will be shaped by developments that cannot yet be predicted, developments which will probably surprise even those countries whose policies precipitated them. We will only waste time if we continue to pretend, as we unfortunately too often have for the last four years, that we can gather in a room in New York to decide the twenty-first century's geopolitical power structure through abstract intellectual debates.

Let me conclude by illustrating the point more concretely. My delegation has on several occasions commented on the studied ambiguity with which several, if not the majority, of the current permanent members have cloaked crucial aspects of their position on Security Council reform. This is understandable. No country is ever comfortable with a change in a status quo that favours it. But, that said, I must also acknowledge that a majority of the permanent members have appeared most categoric in their desire to see Japan and Germany as new permanent members. Let me therefore take that as the starting point of my illustration.

Many countries, certainly including my own and perhaps even a majority of Member States, would agree that when general agreement is reached on the expansion of the Security Council, Japan and Germany should be

among the new permanent members. That Japan and Germany now exercise global economic clout is not in dispute. Nor is the fact that they want and are searching for a bigger international political role. These are positive developments. They are among the new realities whose consequences have yet to unfold.

But precisely because of this, there is still no clear consensus, either in Germany or Japan or in their respective regions, on the precise international roles they should play, particularly if this will involve the deployment of military forces. There has never been a period in the entire sweep of Asian history in which China and Japan have been simultaneously strong Powers. We are now entering such a period, with all its attendant uncertainties. In Europe, a newly unified Germany and a Russia that is still struggling to redefine itself apart from the former Soviet Union are both, for different reasons, currently internally preoccupied. Neither has yet definitively settled their relationship with each other or with their neighbours.

It is therefore not surprising that China and Russia, like all other permanent members, have not been clear on whether or not Japan and Germany should have the veto. It is therefore still unclear whether they really believe Germany and Japan should be new permanent members — and this even though Japan and Germany enjoy widespread support for permanent membership from many other Member States.

I am not suggesting that Moscow and Beijing are being particularly difficult or different. After all, even the United States has not yet clearly stated that it trusts its own treaty allies, whose elevation to permanent status it strongly and publicly advocates, sufficiently to give them a veto over American policies. And even if the Administration is willing to do so, I am not sure Congress would agree.

This hesitation and coyness is perhaps only prudent. Perhaps it is even a duty, given the geopolitical uncertainties of the contemporary international system. Nobody wants to give any hostages to fortune. For the same reason, no Government that really believes that its country deserves permanent status can permanently commit all future governments to giving up the veto. The geopolitical uncertainties are no less elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They will certainly not be settled by conceptually contradictory slogans such as permanent rotational membership, as has been suggested by some.

I hope I am not misunderstood. I am not suggesting that China and Japan cannot cooperate or that Germany and Russia will never coexist. This is obviously not true, because they are already doing so. But the present happy situation is not to be taken for granted given the long, complex and often troubled history of relations between these countries — a history that, in the case of China and Japan, has been characterized by many centuries of profound ambiguity. It is not unreasonable for countries that enjoy the privileges of the status quo to prefer to avoid making precipitate decisions. In fact, this is an entirely reasonable position to take given the geopolitical uncertainties. It would therefore be equally unreasonable to expect Asia, Africa or Latin America to take precipitate decisions on who from their regions should enjoy permanent status.

Time and events will clarify matters. How much time, no one can presently honestly say. Events must mature and unfold naturally to clarify themselves. This is not a process that can or should be rushed.

We would do the United Nations and the Security Council grievous damage if we were to take decisions that might eventually bear only a tenuous relationship to what finally evolves in the real world. Any international organization of sovereign States dooms itself to irrelevance if it ignores or divorces itself from the realities in which it is embedded. And the shape of those realities can be only imperfectly glimpsed at present. This is why we, like other Non-Aligned Movement countries, have been consistent in cautioning against a hasty decision on Security Council reform. A Security Council that includes all who now most assiduously press their claims to permanent status, but excludes other, currently not so obvious candidates whose claims may yet become compelling, would not just be ineffective. It would tear this Organization apart.

Four years is not a long time, given the gravity of the issues at stake. We understand the frustrations of those who see their hopes and ambitions recede with each passing year of endless debate. But pressure-cooking the process will not settle the crucial geopolitical realities that will, in the end, be decisive. Those countries that deserve permanent status will be given it when the time is ripe, not before. And when the time is ripe, there is no power that can resist their claims. Let us therefore not lose faith or patience and by so doing come to regret the consequences.

Mr. Gomersall (United Kingdom): I do not wish to be misunderstood either. I do not want it to be thought that I am taking the floor in right of reply to the previous speaker. His views are always stimulating, though slightly exaggerated. But, as always, finding fault with the existing realities is somewhat of an evasion of the necessity which I think we all feel to try and find a way forward to the problems which he delineates, and the only way forward is to find a solution through negotiation. We have made a lot of painstaking efforts in that direction, and my delegation believes that the sensible thing to do is to continue.

It is always easy to attack the existing system without being quite so frank about the choices which all countries have to make with regard to the areas closest to themselves. We believe that the proposals which are on the table, in particular those submitted by President Razali last year, offer the best way of dealing with that admittedly very sensitive subject.

It was four years and one day ago that the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/26, which established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council, four years in which everybody has been agreed on the objective of enlargement of the Security Council, but in which, to the disappointment and frustration of the vast majority of us, a clearly ratifiable proposal for enlargement has yet to emerge. But the issue of the enlargement of the Security Council and reform of the methods of work of the Security Council remains as important now as it seemed to be four years ago. The political case for this item of reform is just as compelling as it is for other aspects of the modernization of this Organization.

We are closer now to seeing the outlines of a solution than we were at this time last year. This progress can be ascribed to two major developments: first, the consultations carried out by the co-vice-chairmen of the Working Group last winter. Their soundings demonstrated beyond any doubt that the vast majority of Member States do not want a temporary, half-hearted reform in just one category of Council membership, but a durable and significant enlargement in both categories of membership that increases developing country representation in those two categories. This general objective has furthermore been endorsed by several of the permanent members. For this, and for the rest of their hard work, we owe the co-Vice-Chairmen, Ambassadors Breitenstein and Jayanama, a vote of great thanks.

The second development was the presentation last March, by the then President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali, of a draft resolution on reform. This moved the discussion in a more concrete direction, and was the sort of comprehensive proposal which had long been required. It built on the co-vice-chairmen's consultations. It identified the mainstream in the debate, and came to be regarded as successfully representing the negotiating middle ground. Although it presented a number of delegations, including my own, with problems, it offered by far the best prospect for a solution so far, and indeed sparked a considerable amount of further positive consideration about how some of the remaining issues might eventually be solved. This was perhaps the most fruitful time in our debate so far, and we look forward to further consideration of the proposal this year.

Of course, neither of these developments brought about a consensus. Like your predecessor, Mr. President, you will be wise enough to recognize that consensus on a solution to this particular issue is probably unobtainable. But we recognize the need to respect the requirements of Article 108 of the Charter in a resolution adopting amendments to the Charter. Indeed, the statutory two-thirds majority for such a resolution would be a barely acceptable minimum. We want further efforts on a concrete proposal to reconcile the views of the greatest possible number of Member States. But at the end of the day, the General Assembly is here to take political decisions, and every effort should be made to take the necessary decisions at this session of the General Assembly — and by the largest possible majority.

There is always an argument for putting something off. When Mr. Razali produced his proposal, the response was not so much that he had misjudged the content, but that more time should be given for consultation, particularly at the level of regional groups, and that the Assembly should not be rushed into a decision which would have lasting implications. That was nearly nine months ago. The proposal did serve, however, as an impetus for more focused thinking on how the tricky questions — in particular that of selecting new permanent members, especially from the developing world — should be approached, and in this regard it was a positive step forward.

Draft resolution A/52/L.7, sponsored by Italy and others, is, on the other hand, simply an invitation to eternal delay. Whatever the diversity of views among its supporters, it offers a backhanded endorsement of the

status quo and ignores the progress which we made last year. We would share many of the specific comments made on the draft resolution by Ambassador Eitel in his latest letter to Permanent Representatives. We therefore welcome the announcement by you, Mr. President, of the understanding that no action will be taken on draft resolution A/52/L.7 at this stage.

The challenge remains, however, for the majority to find a basis for a broadly supported decision. My delegation is only one of many which have shown flexibility and political will over the last few months to try to achieve this, and we are not about to abandon the effort. There is now a much greater understanding on all sides of the parameters within which a workable outcome can be reached, and we will continue to make every effort with like-minded countries to bring this necessary reform to early fruition. Indeed, we are encouraged by the fact that the political energy still invested in this discussion proves that, underneath it all, there is a widespread recognition that this reform is inevitable.

We hope therefore that we shall begin our work in the new year with determination, building on the progress made during the fifty-first session and with an eye to taking a decision on the size and shape of the Council before the end of this "Reform Assembly".

Mr. Eitel (Germany): For several weeks, many of us have been working to prepare for the discussion on agenda item 59. I am pleased that today offers another opportunity to make a couple of remarks on the issue. It is first and foremost here in the General Assembly that the important issues are and must be decided.

You, Mr. President, have prepared this debate carefully. You have consulted many delegations and have formed a common understanding about the way for our discussions to go forward and about their procedural result. You have acted with the authority and credibility inherent in the office of the President, and you deserve credit and applause. My delegation will do everything to respect and support your guidance.

The year 1997, especially the past few weeks, has been particularly dynamic as far as Security Council reform is concerned. It seems to me that procedural considerations, such as when and how the General Assembly should take a decision, have become more and more important and have been discussed almost more frequently than substance.

What precisely has happened since the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council started its work last January? First, we have witnessed the largest consultations in the history of the United Nations: the consultations of the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Breiterstein and Ambassador Jayanama, with 165 Member States, which led to major findings and clear majority views. Secondly, we have witnessed the presentation of the first full reform package, submitted by the former Chairman, Ambassador Razali. Thirdly, we have participated in the opening debate of the new session with Member States overwhelmingly focusing on United Nations and Security Council reform.

On these lines, I would like in my statement to focus on the following four main points: Germany as part of the mainstream; putting an end to self-centred discussions; the need for an agenda rather than an imposed time-frame; and faithful application of Article 108 of the Charter.

Six general debates, six agenda item debates and four Open-ended Working Group reports, with 48 annexes all together, have provided us with an extraordinary amount of statements, positions and proposals. Sometimes I feel as if we were like 185 pedestrians, looking for their way home in a big, rather dark, city with many unfamiliar streets, avenues and places. Many of us were lucky to find their way — they took what I will call the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". That Avenue is ample and straight, with enough space for everyone. I would like to see as many as possible of the pedestrians who are still in search of their way, join those who have started to walk down the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". This Avenue is spacious; it has two lanes. It is straight; there are no unnecessary detours. It is secure in spite of heavy traffic — hopefully, 24 members of an enlarged Council. It has enough sidewalk space. It is easy to look down because it is transparent. And it is easy to maintain — the next overhaul, by a review, is already scheduled.

In my view, both the former Chairman and the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group have made it clear in their papers annexed to the last report that their assessment of the views of 165 Member States go in that direction. One of the main findings was that a very large majority supported an increase in both categories — permanent and non-permanent — with a

At that time, the Security Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it condemned these provocative acts. At that meeting of the Security Council, which took place during the session of the General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the Security Council, along with other Ministers of the Member States of the United Nations took part in the Security Council's discussions.

America's position remains hesitant. It is not playing its role effectively as a sponsor of the peace process. The parties concerned have accepted the initiative put forward by a former American President, Mr. George Bush, in 1991, and the Madrid Peace Conference was convened on the basis of the land-for-peace formula and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab and Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which relates to withdrawal from Southern Lebanon.

But, as usual, the Israeli Government turned its back completely on the resolutions of the Security Council and on all the other accords and obligations. The United States was supposed to play a vital and active role in reviving the peace process and bringing pressure to bear on Israel, utilizing its special means. That gave Israel valuable time in which to confiscate more Palestinian land, build more Israeli settlements, tighten its blockade against the Palestinian people, economically and militarily, and paralyse the movement of the Palestinian citizens.

The Israeli blockade prevents Palestinian citizens from moving, hampers the transfer of goods and the movement of the populace within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and between them, prevents entry and departure to and from the Palestinian territories, erects checkpoints, and isolates towns and villages, preventing the population from moving between them. Such measures have led to a severe shortage of primary materials and foodstuffs, resulting in economic paralysis. They have also raised the rate of unemployment to about 65 per cent and had a serious adverse impact on national and foreign investments, which have declined substantially.

Moreover, the Israeli Government has withheld tax revenues which it collected from Palestinian citizens, and which are due to the Palestinian National Authority. This was substantiated by the report of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, of 26 June 1997 (A/ES-10/6).

At the same time, Israel has backtracked from the agreement that was reached on the return of displaced Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip who were expelled as a result of the aggression committed in 1967. The total number of these displaced persons is no less than 750,000. That commitment should have been implemented, in pursuance of Security Council resolution 237 (1967), as well as under the 1993 Declaration of Principles. Israel also continues to deny to those refugees who were ejected from Palestine in 1948 their right to return to their homes under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Here it should be kept in mind that Israel was born in the United Nations under General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 and did not emerge through history. That partition resolution was a birth certificate not only for Israel but also for an independent Arab State of Palestine. In this context, it is very bizarre that today we hear the current Israeli Prime Minister threatening to annex Palestinian territory if the Palestine Organization were to declare an independent State of Palestine.

Four years have elapsed, and Israel continues to prevaricate and is engaged in an exercise of subterfuge and circumvention in its interpretation of the provisions of the accords and agreements that were reached. It continues to Judaize more and more Palestinian territory through the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of more and more settlements and the tightening of the siege imposed upon the Palestinian Authority, in order to cripple its effectiveness and obstruct the path of the Palestinian people with a view to denying them their right to exercise sovereignty over their national territory and resources.

Israel denies the Palestinian people their national rights, and is engaged in intensive efforts to perpetuate the settler presence on Palestinian territories and increase the number of settlements and settlers constantly. The objective is to make the Israeli settlements not only difficult, but impossible, to dismantle in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which, by a unanimous vote, called for their dismantlement. Successive Security Council resolutions have emphasized that Israeli policies and practices of building settlements are illegal and are serious impediments to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace. Furthermore, they contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as well as international law. The Security Council went even further than that. Resolution 465 (1980), unanimously adopted by the Security Council

in March 1980, called on Israel to dismantle the Israeli settlements that were in existence at that time.

Since then we have noted a regression in the position of the United States of America. The United States took no action beyond pro forma protests regarding Israel's settlement activity. Indeed, on certain occasions, the United States allowed Israel to complete construction activities in some settlements, even though perceiving in those settlements an obstacle to peaceful settlement and a factor that complicates the peace process.

We have noticed recently that the United States, regrettably, has started to look at the issue from an Israeli perspective. It has stated that the United Nations no longer has a role to play in the questions pertaining to a peaceful, political settlement such as of Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian sovereignty.

Most recently, the United States exercised its veto twice in one week in the Security Council, in order to prevent the Council from undertaking its responsibilities. That action by the United States led to the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, the first in 15 years. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those Member States which supported the convening of that special session and voted in favour of the important resolutions it adopted. We continue to hope that those resolutions will be implemented.

By backtracking on the accords that have been reached, Israel deliberately seeks to tighten its control and hegemony over Palestinian land and resources in order to continue its settlement activity without hindrance. Israel has built bypass roads linking the Israeli settlements, of which there are now 183 in the West Bank. These bypass roads do not run through Palestinian villages, but around them. Indeed, they are a siege against those Palestinian villages and towns. Israel uses those bypass roads for its military and security purposes, thereby managing to isolate the Palestinian villages and towns and cut them off from each other, creating for them severe economic, social and security problems.

This is an accurate account of developments in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. As to the other tracks, namely the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese, these are still frozen. But more serious than that, the Israeli Government is now scheming against those two sister countries. The Israeli army is committing repeated acts of aggression against sister Lebanon, creating scores of civilian casualties and destroying the country's vital centres. Yet Israel claims that it is prepared to withdraw first from southern Lebanon and then expresses its wish for peace while continuing to commit acts of aggression against Lebanon.

Facts and events show that the peace process in the Middle East is at an impasse owing to the behaviour of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his political group and the provocative measures taken by that country. As a sponsor of the peace process, the United States should have played its role in reviving the peace process. The situation today requires a reaffirmation by the United Nations of its permanent responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security and in ensuring the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council calling for Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967 so that the cycle of violence and tension will not recur, particularly given the disappearance of confidence between the parties to the conflict.

The United Nations has previously taken practical measures to address numerous international problems. Is it not now time for the Organization to take concrete steps to preserve the peace, to halt the deterioration of the security situation in the region, and to preserve and revitalize the peace process on the basis of the principles set forth at the Madrid Conference? Israel's persistence in its approach makes it impossible to achieve success in political negotiations or to reach a solution which would keep peace and security in the region. The perpetuation of Israeli occupation and its continuation of settlement activities inevitably doom the peace process, which demands first and foremost Israel's withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel must also dismantle the Israeli settlements. Unless those things are accomplished, the entire region of the Middle East will continue to be vulnerable to explosions and successive wars.

There is no doubt that the decision by the Arab States to suspend the normalization of relations with Israel and to stay away from meetings of the various multilateral commissions, as well as the absence of most of the Arab States from the recent economic forum in Doha, Qatar, are definite evidence of the loss of confidence in the success of the peace process.

The requirements of peace and security call for all Member States to respect Security Council resolutions

and to commit to their implementation so that the United Nations may remain an effective mechanism for addressing regional problems by peaceful means. However, we see that some Powers are acting according to a double standard and that they exempt Israel from compliance with United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, even though that country is the party that threatens peace and security in the region thanks to its possession of weapons of mass destruction and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons while continuing to impede the peace process, freezing it.

The continued sanctions against Iraq, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan have begun to raise questions in world public opinion about the duration of such sanctions. Is it not time that such unjust sanctions be lifted and that conditions be created that could bring relief to the Iraqi population, so that Iraqi children might have the basic life requirements of foodstuffs and medical supplies and the country have a chance to return to international life as an effective member of the world community?

We look forward to the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, especially those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, including those regarding the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in order to examine the necessary coercive measures to be adopted to ensure respect for that Convention and the implementation of its provisions in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 by Israel, including Jerusalem.

We also hope that at this session the General Assembly will endorse the full participation of Palestine in the proceedings of the United Nations and ensure that participation by Israel in those proceedings is in line with the provisions of international law and those of the Fourth Geneva Convention with regard to the Arab territories occupied since 1967, especially with regard to Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan.

We stand for comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principles of the Madrid Conference and in keeping with the provisions of United Nations Charter and its resolutions. However, we reject surrender to faits accomplis or the recognition of illegal de facto conditions created on the ground by Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. We shall resist that injustice and aggression on the basis of our right to existence and to self-determination as a nation that has lived on that land for thousands of years and established there its glorious civilization.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East Peace Process has reached a worrying impasse. The conclusion in January 1997 of the protocol concerning the redeployment in Hebron kindled hopes of a renewal of trust between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government and hopes that this renewed trust would create a climate conducive to further fruitful negotiations. The construction of a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homa unfortunately put an end to this encouraging perspective.

Terrorist acts, for which there can be no justification, have further compromised the trust between the parties and aggravated the crisis in the peace talks.

The European Union calls on the parties to resume political dialogue, to continue the negotiations in order to make progress on the implementation of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron protocol, and to resume the final status talks. It is therefore vital to refrain from any unilateral action that would prejudge questions relating to the final status and to restore on a lasting basis full and complete cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The European Union strongly reaffirms that peace in the Middle East is a question of fundamental importance to it. It will continue its efforts to support the peace process through the relations of friendship and trust that it enjoys with the various parties by intensifying its commitment at the diplomatic level, including through its special envoy for the Middle East peace process, Ambassador Moratinos, as well as its economic commitment in the region.

Thus, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Jacques F. Poos, visited the region from 11 to 14 November 1997. On this occasion, he reaffirmed to his Middle East partners the Union's commitment to working to assist the current peace efforts.

In this context, the President of the Council argued in favour of implementing confidence-building measures, such as the opening of the Gaza airport, the construction of a port and free passage for Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank. He also insisted on the need to finalize a code of good conduct between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He also repeated the European Union's view that, important as such confidence-building measures may be, they should not obscure the real priorities of the peace process, namely the implementation of the agreed peace accords concerning the withdrawal of Israeli troops, as well as the fight against terrorism and the opening of the final status talks.

In addition to these political efforts, the European Union has undertaken to provide substantial funding to promote the economic and social development of the Palestinian population. Thus, the Union remains the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have pledged ECU 500 million in aid for the period from 1994 to 1999. In 1997, a package of ECU 50 million was specifically allocated to education and the media and to technical assistance to the municipalities and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Finally, ECU 4 million have been made available to the Palestinian Authority in order to meet its immediate needs on account of Israel's withholding of fiscal revenues due.

There is no alternative to the peace process launched in Madrid and Oslo. The European Union calls on the peoples and Governments of the region to regain the spirit of mutual trust that kindled the hope of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would make it possible to resolve the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): At the outset let me announce that Bangladesh has become one of the sponsors of three draft resolutions, A/52/L.49, L.50 and L.51, that are now being circulated on this question.

Bangladesh is deeply appreciative of the substantive report on the question of Palestine submitted by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in document A/52/35. We commend the good work being done by this 23-member Committee as the organ of the General Assembly dealing with the question of Palestine. Bangladesh has had the honour of attending its sessions as an observer on a regular basis. We also pay tribute to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal for his leadership as the Chairman of the Committee. The report reminds the international community how much work still needs to be done — notwithstanding so many resolutions, United Nations sessions and international conferences — to bring about a just resolution of the Palestine question and, thus, achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The year 1997 marks three decades that Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories. It is also the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the intifadah, the Palestinian uprising that helped create the conditions for the peace process. Bangladesh therefore underscores the need to redouble this year our efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East by establishing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Like the Palestinian Rights Committee, we are extremely concerned and anguished that the hopes ushered in by initial positive developments in the region are not being realized, leaving the peace process increasingly in jeopardy and, at the same time, causing an alarming exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a matter of grave concern to the international community. It is indeed unfortunate that the Israeli authorities have — in defiance of all United Nations resolutions and in flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people — continued to pursue repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The United Nations has stressed the need to preserve the territorial integrity of all the occupied Palestinian territory and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods in the territory, including the removal of restrictions on movement into and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world. The United Nations has also demanded immediate and full cessation of construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem.

Regrettably, Israel has not heeded this demand and has, in fact, continued with such illegal measures and actions, including violating the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory and imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods. Bangladesh believes that the harsh economic measures imposed against the occupied Palestinian territory, including the prolonged blockade, are a form of collective punishment, in contravention of international law and the agreements reached.

Bangladesh, which is committed by its Constitution to supporting oppressed peoples throughout the world, has consistently expressed strong solidarity with our Palestinian brethren, always and everywhere, in particular at the United Nations and in all major international forums. We reiterate our strong condemnation of Israel's policy of systematic violation of international humanitarian law, as well as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, in the occupied territories. In her message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year on 29 November, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that:

> "We reiterate our appeal for ensuring the applicability of the relevant Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories so that the dignity of the Palestinian people is no more assailed, so that no Palestinian is subjected to humiliation or degrading treatment, so that they receive the protection provided by international law."

My delegation would like to stress the necessity for commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, and the need for immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreement reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank and the commencement of negotiations on the final settlement. Bangladesh joins others in calling for a reinjection of momentum into the stalled Middle East peace process. We call upon the concerned parties, the sponsors of the peace process and other international parties, as well as the entire international community, to undertake all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and to ensure its continuity and success.

Bangladesh believes that, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace, it is absolutely necessary to end all illegal measures and actions by Israel. It cannot be overemphasized that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict will constitute a significant contribution to strengthening international peace, security and progress. We urge all concerned to ensure that the peace accords are complied with fully and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority pursued in a congenial atmosphere. The peace process can be effectively advanced by the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, stopping settlement in those areas with immediate effect, and allowing the Palestinian diaspora to return with full dignity to its homeland. It is also essential that the international community be forthcoming in fulfilling its commitment to supporting the peace process by extending economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during the interim period.

My delegation strongly supports the call voiced by delegations for conferring upon Palestine the same rights and privileges of participation, except voting rights and candidatures, as those conferred upon States Members of the United Nations in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and in the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations. We also strongly support the Palestinian rights Committee's view that the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat continues to make a useful and constructive contribution to the dissemination of information on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. We request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources to enable it to perform its task and to cover adequately the various aspects of the question of Palestine, including the project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a critical moment in the history of the Middle East region, for the peace process which began in 1991, generating great hopes and expectations that a durable and lasting peace was within reach — especially one that included the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and independence — has been jeopardized. The region now stands dangerously close to becoming embroiled in tension and turmoil. The continuing ordeal of the Palestinians, as well as the deteriorating situation on the ground, are well chronicled in the report to the Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Allow me at this juncture to commend Ambassador Ibra Ka, whose dedicated service and dynamic stewardship of the Committee — of which Indonesia takes pride in having been a member since its inception — has helped to mobilize global opinion at this

critical stage of the peace process to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

The past year has been marked by increasing tension, which has been exacerbated by a stalemate in the peace process. The tragedies of the past risk being reenacted and the spirit of peace and harmony appears to be fading into the distance. We had earnestly hoped, along with the rest of the international community, that the peace accords that were so scrupulously and painstakingly negotiated would be implemented in good faith. Instead, we are confronted with a retreat from those very fundamental principles of the peace process, a defiant refusal by the Government of Israel to honour its legal obligations and commitments, and an audacious attempt unilaterally to abrogate the peace accords. These actions are contrary to all acceptable norms of international relations and an affront to the principles of justice.

Meanwhile, it is appalling that the Israeli authorities have embarked on perpetuating policies which can only have untold and disastrous consequences. Foremost of these is the expansion of settlements in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim, compounded by other untenable actions, such as the demolition of properties, closures, and the denial of residency rights to Palestinians in Jerusalem by the confiscation of documents. These acts have not only dealt a serious blow to the peace process, but have inflamed passions in the occupied territories and throughout the world.

It was in this overriding context that the international community, through the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened three times over the past year, expressed its unequivocal condemnation of Israel's settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of occupied East Jerusalem, as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, international law and other relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Clearly, the Government of Israel cannot hide under the flimsy pretext of security considerations to justify its untenable actions against an entire people, nor can it rationalize its acts of intimidation and practices of repression and persecution. Such ill-conceived policies do not bode well for a stable peace in the region and entail even greater ramifications for the world at large. It would mark a return to aggression and be an assault on peace, for peace and security are intertwined and cannot exist on the basis of the usurpation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Government of Israel must be urged to implement its legal commitments with consistency and fairness. Only in this way can a climate of mutual trust and confidence be fostered, enabling the parties to resume negotiations on the remaining issues and thereby paving the way to genuine peace.

It is self-evident that a difficult road lies ahead in surmounting the decades of occupation and injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations and its agencies have a central role to play in alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people, and also in assisting in carrying out the formidable and challenging tasks of nation-building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Ambassador Chinmaya R. Gharekhan as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization, as well as to maintain contact with the donor community and other non-governmental organizations in this field.

It was five decades ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine with the adoption of resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet this question remains on our agenda. Without a shadow of a doubt, a durable and just solution to this intractable problem can be attained only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights — including the right to return to their own independent homeland — based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

For its part, Indonesia will continue to give unswerving support to the valiant Palestinian people. It has consistently maintained the Palestinian national cause as a matter consonant with the fundamental principles and purposes enshrined in its own Constitution. It was therefore most gratifying for Indonesia to host the Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta from 4 to 7 May 1997, which provided an appropriate forum to explore all avenues which would lead to a comprehensive and just settlement to the question of Palestine.

Standing at the threshold of the next century, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that a displaced people who have

known nothing but frustration and bitterness, deprivation and denial, will finally emerge triumphant.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of my delegation, my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the clear and comprehensive report on the question of Palestine which each has submitted.

In the light of events during the past year, we can affirm that progress on this question has not met the expectations of the international community. In fact, the peace process on which it had placed so much hope has been at an impasse for several months now.

The serious setback sustained by the peace process is undoubtedly the result of the unilateral decision of the Israeli Government to build a new settlement in occupied East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of agreements concluded. This unfortunate decision has plunged the entire region of the Middle East — and in particular the occupied Palestinian territory — into an alarming political situation characterized in particular by an escalation of violence on the ground and, above all, by numerous losses of human lives, both Palestinian and Israeli.

The prevailing situation of confrontation is all the more regrettable since the bilateral negotiations which were begun in order to implement the agreements were at a critical phase regarding the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Such an atmosphere, along with the fact that the Security Council has twice been prevented from taking the necessary measures to deal with this issue, led the international community — represented by the General Assembly — to hold an emergency special session, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter. However, despite the adoption by an overwhelming majority of Member States, of resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, which, among other things, demanded that Israel renounce all illegal measures and activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the political situation and security have continued to deteriorate as a result of the Israeli Government's non-compliance with the provisions of those resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

This is why public opinion throughout the world has been perturbed by the Israeli policy and practices in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, policy and practices which threaten to plunge the Middle East region into a new period of conflict unless we take care to prevent it. Even in Israel, more and more voices are raised to demand the relaunching of the peace process and to express their disappointment, even frustration, concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel.

The popular rally organized in Tel Aviv last 8 November, at the very site of the assassination of one of the great architects of the peace process, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is the most striking illustration of this. Moreover, this general mobilization for peace was unanimously acknowledged to have been the greatest gathering in the history of Israel.

My delegation therefore shares the point of view expressed by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People when it affirms in its report that it is

> "essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached and for the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis." (A/52/35, para. 125)

Our General Assembly must shoulder this task, as it has been given a permanent responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is settled in all its aspects.

My delegation calls on the parties concerned to re-establish an ongoing dialogue and resume their cooperation to change the current alarming situation and make progress in the effective implementation of the agreements reached, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Indeed, as we know, peace is an endeavour based on mutual trust and requiring behaviour which will lead to an atmosphere of calm. Therefore, my delegation particularly urges the Israeli Government to once and for all renounce all the illegal measures it has taken, since these are endangering the Middle East peace process. Only in this way can a new opportunity be given to the peace that the international community so ardently hopes to see.

Before concluding my statement, I should like to reiterate to the Assembly the conviction of the people and Government of Niger that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East hinges on the necessary exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent State, and on scrupulous respect of the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as of the obligations enshrined in agreements already concluded.

Niger will spare no effort to ensure the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that in connection with the item under consideration, five draft resolutions, contained in documents A/52/L.49 through A/52/L.53, have just been distributed to delegations in the Hall.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): In the six years that have elapsed since the Madrid Conference, the Middle East peace process has made important headway thanks to the joint efforts of Palestine and Israel and the extensive support of the international community. Earlier this year, Palestine and Israel reached an agreement on the question of Hebron, which advanced the self-rule process of the Palestinian people another step forward. However, the insistence of the Israeli side on building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem has led to serious difficulties in the Middle East peace process, to the suspension of Palestine-Israel peace talks and to the escalation of terrorist violence. The international community is deeply concerned and disturbed by this situation.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. The suffering of the Palestinian people over the past 50 years has elicited broad concern and sympathy from the international community. Only a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the restoration to the Palestinian people of all their legitimate national rights, including the right to establish an independent State, can bring about genuine and lasting peace in the region.

The history of the Middle East over the past decades, and particularly the developments in the Middle East peace process in recent years, have proved that the countries in the region can enjoy real security and promote regional economic cooperation and common development only when there is a comprehensive and just peace. To this end, we call on Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, and we hope that all parties concerned will continue to take a flexible and pragmatic approach, strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, fulfil in real earnest their obligations, remove obstructions and resume talks at an early date on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, so as to push the peace process forward.

For historical reasons and as a result of the continued closure and sanctions, people's lives and the economy in the areas of Palestinian self-rule have faced many difficulties since the start of that self-rule; this has seriously hindered development. The Israeli side should refrain from enforcing closure in the self-rule areas and from freezing Palestinian assets at will. The international community should also provide greater support and assistance for the Palestinian people. In this connection, developed countries should undertake additional obligations and honour at an early date the commitments already entered into so as to facilitate an early economic recovery and development in the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

In recent years, the United Nations has played an increasingly important role in resolving regional conflicts and in the maintenance of international peace, and it has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East as a whole. Since the beginning of this year, the General Assembly has convened its tenth emergency special session and two resumed sessions on the question of Palestine and adopted relevant resolutions; for this we wish to express our appreciation. We hope and believe that the United Nations will play an even greater positive role in advancing the Middle East peace process and ultimately bringing about a comprehensive, fair and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East question.

The Chinese Government and people are very much concerned about the developments in the Middle East region. We have consistently supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and contributed to promoting the Middle East peace process. We are of the view that peace and stability in the Middle East region accord with the fundamental interests of the peoples in the region and contribute to peace and development in the world as a whole. We will, as always, work untiringly with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided, and will continue to

provide, assistance, to extent of its ability, to the Palestinian people through various channels and contribute its share to the economic development of the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

Mr. Gold (Israel): In the last four years, the people of Israel have witnessed two contrasting realities in their pursuit of peace with the Palestinians. True, there were a stunning series of diplomatic breakthroughs between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), followed by a peace treaty with Jordan and a web of new relationships with a half-dozen Arab States. Israelis were filled with hope that at long last their state of siege had ended and that they could look forward to an era of normalcy and safety.

But the people of Israel witnessed another reality as well. From the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO until the May 1996 election of the current Israeli Government, nearly 250 Israelis died in an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terrorism aimed at the heart of Israel's cities and in their vicinity: in Afula, Hadera, Beit-Lid, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Indeed, more Israelis died in these three years from such attacks than in the previous decade. During 1997, while the frequency of these attacks was reduced, the bombings continued nonetheless in the Mahane Yehuda market and the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem.

Israel had known terrorism before, but these cases reflected a completely different situation. These were not occasional knifings or individual drive-by shootings, but highly lethal suicide bombings backed by a vast and expanding organizational infrastructure. It recruited and trained personnel, manufactured and stockpiled weapons materials, and commanded and financed elaborate operations. Military-grade explosives, which had not been used in such attacks in more than 10 years, were suddenly available in large quantities, with devastating results. But whether belonging to the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam units of the Hamas or to the Islamic Jihad, this organizational infrastructure was growing in the very same territories that had been given over to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Today there is a common misconception that the peace process was in an idyllic state until last year and has only just lately deteriorated. This is completely false. It is as false on the Palestinian negotiating track as it is on the Syrian track, where Israel went through two mini-wars in Lebanon and absorbed more than 200 Katyusha rocket strikes from Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon. The fact is that the present Israeli Government inherited a peace process that was in a shambles because the core bargain of the Oslo agreements had been repeatedly violated: that Israel would address Palestinian aspirations by creating areas of Palestinian self-government and that the Palestinian Authority would assume responsibility for security in those very same areas. This bargain has not been kept. As a result, innocent Israelis have paid for this with their lives in brutal suicide bombing after suicide bombing in the heart of our cities.

The Government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had many options by which to contend with this mounting terror. Israel could have let despair and cynicism overtake diplomacy and could have declared that the peace process had failed. The Israeli Government rejected this option. The Government could have ignored the truth behind these assaults in our cities and blamed only distant adversaries, such as Iran. This would have failed to address the fact that the wave of terror attacks in Israel was emanating from areas under the military control of our negotiating partners. Only by insisting on their accountability could we save the lives of our people. Therefore we chose the option of making an impaired peace process work by adding principles of peacemaking that previously had been lacking.

This September, Israel's Foreign Minister, David Levy, stood before the General Assembly and suggested a code of conduct for strengthening negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The first principle of the code of conduct would state that violence is totally incompatible with peace and reconciliation. Removing violence from the negotiations means that the Palestinian fight against terrorism would be made constant, and not contingent upon the extent of Israeli concessions, as explicitly demanded by Colonel Jabril Rajub of the Palestinian Authority. Removing violence from negotiations means that Palestinian security services would quell street rioting in Bethlehem and Hebron instead of inciting it. Removing violence means that Chairman Arafat would give no green lights to Hamas to attack Israel, as occurred on 9 March 1997. Removing violence means that the masterminds of the 1996 Dizingoff Centre bombing in Tel Aviv would be prosecuted and imprisoned rather than be set free to organize new cells for attacking Israel, as is occurring today.

To make negotiations work, the code of conduct suggested moreover that the continuity of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians should be protected, and

not be disrupted for short-term gain. Normalization between Israel and the wider region, it was suggested, should not be halted, but should be increased. And our differences should be resolved in bilateral negotiations, not in international forums.

Beyond the code of conduct, Israel has insisted that the Oslo process be based on the principle of reciprocity. On 15 January 1997, at the signing of the Hebron Protocol, both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chairman Yasser Arafat specifically committed themselves to implement their mutual obligations on the basis of reciprocity in the Note for the Record that was signed by the United States peace coordinator, Ambassador Dennis Ross. To this day, while parts of the international community want to place ever-mounting pressure on Israel to move on with the peace process, not a single Palestinian commitment that appears in that document has been implemented: the revision of the Palestinian Covenant calling for Israel's destruction remains incomplete; illegal firearms have not been collected; the language of incitement continues; not a single terrorist has been extradited; and, most important, the organizational infrastructure of terrorism remains intact within the areas of the Palestinian Authority. And this is only a partial list.

What is Israel supposed to do under such circumstances? Must Israel continue to pull back without getting anything in return? Israel redeployed in Hebron; it freed prisoners; it offered last March a first stage of further redeployment that would have tripled the "A" area of full Palestinian control from 2.8 per cent of the West Bank, which had been turned over by Israel's previous Government, to 10.1 per cent of the West Bank. These are all tangible acts and not just atmospherics or words. Israel is now proposing a second further redeployment; it is only seeking that the infrastructure of terrorism be finally dismantled and that it not just spill over automatically into any new areas that are handed over to Palestinian control. Israel has reengaged in negotiations on the airport, seaport and safe passage; Israel lifted closure, more than doubling the number of Palestinian workers earning their living from the Israeli economy. Israel has complied with its commitments under the Interim Agreement; the Palestinian Authority has not. Where is the reciprocity that was specifically adopted in the Note for the Record and in the United States and European side letters to Israeli and Palestinian leaders?

What stands behind the misconception nonetheless that Israel has not complied? Palestinian spokesmen point to settlement activity, knowing full well that settlement growth is no more a violation of the Oslo agreements than the natural growth of Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinian spokesmen point to our building in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel, knowing that Oslo left Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction. Palestinian spokesmen point to our offer of further redeployment as inadequate, yet they know full well that according to Oslo further redeployment is unilaterally decided and executed by Israel. Indeed, in January 1997, in the Note for the Record, Palestinian negotiators such as Mahmoud Abbas — Abu Mazen — and Saeb Erekat termed further redeployment as an issue for implementation by Israel and not as an issue for negotiation between the parties.

Chairman Arafat signed the Oslo II Interim Agreement in Washington on 28 September 1995 knowing full well that his negotiators had failed in their attempts to achieve a one-sided construction freeze on Israel building. Indeed, our late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, confirmed this fact when he stated one week later, as Oslo II was ratified in the Knesset, that

> "We made a commitment to the Knesset not to uproot any settlement in the framework of the Interim Agreement or to freeze construction and natural growth".

Chairman Arafat signed the Interim Agreement knowing that it left it up to Israel alone to decide the size of a credible further redeployment. What is happening today is that Israel is being asked to make new concessions that go beyond the Oslo agreements in order to win Palestinian compliance with security responsibilities that are within the Oslo agreements. Rather than facing sanction for its adoption of violence, the Palestinian Authority is expecting to be rewarded.

Despite all the difficulties and risks involved, the Government of Israel is determined to make this peace process work. Rather than become mired in the nuances of the Interim Agreement, Israel has recommended that the parties quickly enter and accelerate their negotiations over permanent status. To achieve success in these negotiations, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to adjust their expectations. Israel has begun to adjust its expectations in accordance with Palestinian aspirations; the Palestinians need to adjust their expectations in accordance with Israeli interests and concerns.

For diplomacy must take into account the true context of Israel's situation. Fifty years ago, the General Assembly adopted the majority report of the United

Nations Special Committee on Palestine and adopted a resolution calling for partition and the creation of a Jewish State. Within a half a year, the State of Israel was declared — but it was promptly invaded by the armies of five Arab States that rejected out of hand the General Assembly resolution. From that time onward, no one could talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in isolation from this broader context; Israelis and Palestinians are not located on an island in the Indian Ocean. As a result, any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must not rob Israel of its capacity for self-defence in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

That imperative became clear again when Israel faced a broad coalition of armies that had massed their forces on our armistice lines during the months of May and early June 1967. In the Six Day War that ensued, Israel came into control of the West Bank and became determined never to return to the vulnerable 1967 lines that had invited aggression. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) recognized that need in its call for "secure and recognized boundaries" and its rejection of full Israeli withdrawal from all the new territories that were placed under Israeli administration.

Israel's quest for secure borders against potential adversarial coalitions remains a vital necessity. New factors in military strategy have not altered these considerations. The 1991 Gulf War demonstrated that wars in the Middle East are not decided by ballistic missile barrages, but by the movement of conventional land armies. In any case, Middle East defence resources in the 1990s are still being poured into ground force modernization, into armour and self-propelled artillery. Increasingly, the slow-moving infantry formations of 30 years ago have been replaced throughout the region with rapid armoured and mechanized divisions. This qualitative shift has transpired not only in Syria but also in Iraq, which historically has dispatched large expeditionary forces against Israel, in 1948, in 1967 and again in 1973. Indeed, the combined divisional strength poised to Israel's east rivals the power once aimed at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe at the height of the cold war.

The West Bank has served as a formidable barrier protecting Israel's densely populated coastal plane from conventional military attack. Its 3,000-foot north-south hill ridge is set against an area that is 1,200 feet below sea level, thereby creating a 4,200-foot incline for any attacking army. Israeli deployments along its sparsely populated eastern slopes, and the routes of access for their reinforcement, have become the front line of Israel's defence in the east. And given the three-minute flight time from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea for combat aircraft, the West Bank's airspace and hilltops remain critical components of Israel's air defence. These considerations of topography, space and time become all the more important with the asymmetry between Israel's own small standing army, which requires reserve reinforcement, and the huge standing armies that are arrayed to its east.

Addressing Palestinian claims can help modify the intentions of some of the Arab States to Israel's east. But no stable arrangement can be structured in the long term if it addresses intentions alone, without taking into account these regional military capabilities. It is possible to reach a permanent status solution between Israel and the Palestinians that fully takes into account Israel's vital needs for its self-defence. This will require both flexibility and creativity; it will also require new political thinking. Israel and the Palestinians must find a third way between unbridled Palestinian self-determination and the past record of Israeli military control.

Across the world today — from Ireland to Bosnia, from Afghanistan to Angola — the State system is threatened by dozens of ethno-religious conflicts. Should the principle of unbridled self-determination be applied in every case, the world we know of approximately 185 States will quickly turn into a world of 300 States, in which every tribe and linguistic group seeks independence. This development will not only lead to increasing instability in the Middle East, it will also become the main cause of strategic instability across the entire globe.

Forty years after the demise of the European colonial empires, it is imperative that the world find a balance between the free expression of peoples' national aspirations and the requirements of international security in the twenty-first century. For the world has moved from an era in which decolonization was the primary international concern to an era having to contend with global "Lebanonization".

The "question of Palestine", as it is called in the United Nations, today has implications that go well beyond the Middle East. In each of the difficult post-cold-war conflicts today, common features arise: illegal arms have not been confiscated, radio transmitters incite peoples to violence and direct and proxy terrorism is still a chosen instrument for winning political advantage. If these acts are not stopped by the Palestinian Authority in

our conflict, other regions will learn this lesson. If the systematic use of violence by the Palestinian Authority is rewarded with increased pressures for new Israeli concessions, then violence will come to undermine every process of reconciliation between peoples worldwide.

At the same time, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses both Palestinian aspirations and Israeli needs can serve as a model for the entire world. Despite the disappointment that has grown in Israel in recent years, the hand of peace of all Israelis is extended to our Palestinian partners. The best way to surmount the present environment is for both parties to renew their dedication to resolve all outstanding differences peacefully, in direct, face-to-face negotiations. It is time to begin immediate negotiations on a permanent settlement. United Nations resolutions today that prejudge the outcome of these negotiations do not advance the parties one inch towards reaching peace. Such resolutions simply damage the peace process.

I call on the Member States of the United Nations, particularly Israel's old friends in Africa, Asia and South America, to encourage direct negotiations and to free themselves from mandatory bloc voting. The challenge between Israel and the Palestinians is great, but both peoples are capable of achieving the common purpose that was set out by our leaders four years ago.

Ms. Eshmambetova (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Marzuki (Malaysia): My delegation is seriously concerned about the current status of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which, having started off well following the signing of the Oslo accords, have since encountered a series of serious setbacks. Quite clearly, the disappointing lack of progress in these talks stems from the extreme, hard-line position adopted by the Netanyahu Government. Unilateral decisions and actions taken by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, are a clear manifestation of this hard-line approach and its lack of commitment to the full implementation of agreements signed with the Palestinians. This has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation in the area and placed the peace process in serious jeopardy.

Despite repeated calls by the international community to desist from its uncompromising policies, the Israeli Government continues to pursue these policies in violation of the Israeli-Palestinian accords. These policies include attempts to alter the status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of Arab houses, as well as the continued delay in fully implementing the provisions of the Interim Agreement. Under the present Israeli Government there has been an unprecedented increase in settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Since it assumed power in June 1996 the Government has authorized and encouraged the construction of some 19,000 housing units in existing Jewish settlements, as well as new settlements such as in Jebel Abu Ghneim, completely oblivious to international condemnation and in clear violation of the provisions of the Interim Agreement. What is clear is that this settlement policy is the culmination of an overall grand strategy which since 1967 has led to the confiscation of at least 70 per cent of the Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the construction of 38,500 housing units for the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians. Indeed, as many as 2,300 houses belonging to the Palestinians have been demolished since 1967, and from January to early September 1997 alone, 100 Palestinian houses have been razed to the ground.

It is transparent that the policies being pursued by the Israeli Government with regard to the Arab residents in Jerusalem, including the demolition of their houses to make way for Jewish settlements, confiscation of their identity cards and other forms of harassment, as documented in document A/52/35, are motivated by the Israeli Government's agenda to change the demographic character of the city, designed to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status talks on Jerusalem. While the furtherance of this policy is in clear violation of the Interim Agreement of 1993, it also contravenes Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980), and in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. These violations of international law compelled the General Assembly to convene the tenth emergency special session in April 1997, and to resume it twice, in July and October. Resolutions of that session have, *inter alia*, recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and to ensure respect for the Convention, in accordance with common article 1.

The continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian Arab lands has seriously impacted on the Palestinian economy in the occupied territories. It has led to extreme hardship on the part of the Palestinian people as a whole, whose

freedom of movement has been severely restricted pursuant to Israel's policy of closure in many parts of the occupied territories. This has resulted in further deterioration of the Palestinian economy, characterized by continuing high unemployment and a significant decrease in real wages. In the Gaza Strip the unemployment rate is estimated at a depressing 50 to 60 per cent. In the last four years the annual income of Palestinians has dropped sharply, from $1,800 to $950 in the West Bank and from $1,200 to $600 in the Gaza Strip, forcing an increasing number of Palestinians to live in miserable slums amidst deplorable social, living and health conditions. The appalling situation which Palestinians in the occupied territories find themselves in are further aggravated by a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, such as damaged roads, lack of clean water, inadequate housing and poor health services.

Given the plight of the Palestinian people under occupation, it remains the responsibility of the United Nations to provide much needed economic, social and other assistance pending the resolution of the question of Palestine. In this connection, my delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the various United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their admirable role and untiring involvement in alleviating the hardships faced by the Palestinians. UNRWA plays a leading role, especially in the fields of education, health, relief and social services, and its programmes are without doubt among the most laudable of the United Nations. My delegation is, however, concerned that UNWRA's budget shortfalls will seriously affect its activities. It is therefore critical for the international community to continue to provide adequate and predictable financing to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to make its modest contribution beyond and above its bilateral assistance to Palestine, consistent with its continuing support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for a homeland of their own.

Until the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestine issue, it is incumbent upon Israel, as a Member of this Organization, to abide by all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, Israel must faithfully commit itself to implementing the provisions of all agreements reached with the Palestinians in good faith and without delay. It must make every effort to refrain from taking actions which will undermine further the fragile framework of negotiations which has been put in place following the Oslo accords.

Unless and until a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is achieved, the international community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the Middle East conflict, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Indeed, the international community must redouble its efforts to ensure Israel's full compliance with its international obligations.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts in connection with the peace process in the Middle East. I should also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, for the report submitted to the General Assembly at this session.

Since the convening of the emergency Arab summit meeting in Cairo in June last year, and the crucial decisions adopted there, a spirit of optimism and determination had prevailed throughout the Arab homeland for pursuing the peace process on the basis of firm and serious foundations which would enable us to address the present grave challenges. The decisions adopted by the Arab summit came in response to the sensitive phase of the peace process. At the Cairo summit, the Arab leaders committed themselves at the Cairo summit to achieve a just and comprehensive peace as an irreversible strategic objective and option, to be pursued within the framework of international legality.

Despite this Arab position, a position which bolsters the principles of the peace process, the Israeli Government has ignored legitimate Arab rights and all the accords previously reached and has totally reneged on its obligations. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has adopted a policy of intensified suppression and oppression of the Palestinian people, the consolidation of its occupation of Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the pursuit of a practice of fait accompli.

The Committee, in its report contained in document A/52/35, expressed its increasing concern over the deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension in the occupied territories. The Committee also expressed its concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks owing to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In this context, the Committee also expressed its deep concern for the lack

of respect by the Israeli side for the agreements already signed with the Palestinian counterparts.

The Arab States consider that Israel is responsible for impeding progress in the peace process and perhaps collapsing it entirely.

Here we have the international community, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, attributing responsibility for this setback to the Israeli authorities. The Committee calls on Israel to return to the peace process and to submit to the will of the international community.

Israel's answer to the Arab States and the international community is to continue building more new settlements and to expand the existing ones, in both its declarations and its deeds.

Thus statements made by representatives of various Israeli Government agencies and what we have heard in the Israeli Knesset demonstrate that there is a relentless effort being made to preserve the presence of Jewish colonialist settlers and to reinforce that presence in the West Bank, including Arab East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Work is under way to construct a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem (Al-Quds Al-Sharif) despite the demands of the international community that Israel stop this construction. These calls were made at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened this year under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, on the three occasions that it met.

The Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade approved a $30 million programme to encourage investment in a number of settlements, including four in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Ministry of Defence approved a plan for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem. The Knesset Finance Committee approved a special allocation of $16 million for the reinforcement of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, the Israeli Ministry of the Treasury announced last May the allocation of $16.5 million for further development of Jewish settlements as part of the Israeli Government's decision to establish a special development centre for the settlements.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue a policy of collective punishment in its various forms, from demolition of houses to mass expulsions and the imposition of a total blockade of the Palestinian territories.

From September 1993 — the signing of the peace accord — until now, the Israelis have demolished 270 houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among these, there were 22 houses which were demolished during the time of the Labour Government. Since the Netanyahu Government took office, that is, from 29 May 1996 and up to 29 May 1997, 180 houses were demolished, and some 500 more houses are targeted for demolition in the near future. That is because the Israeli authorities demolish the houses of persons thought to have committed, or who are suspected of committing, what Israel calls security offenses — merely on suspicion — as can be seen from the international reports submitted to us.

The estimates provided to us by the United Nations indicate that the Palestinian gross national product in the occupied territories declined by 20 per cent between 1993 and the end of 1996, even though the World Bank expected that the Palestinian economy would grow by 4 per cent after the Oslo accords. Those estimates indicate that the rate of unemployment ranges between 40 and 45 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total loss suffered by the Palestinian economy during the period 1992 to 1996 amounted to $6 billion — all as a result of the continuing Israeli practices in regard to the strangulation of the Palestinian people, the imposition of the blockade, and the closure of Palestinian territories.

The report submitted to us in document A/52/35 states that Israel continued arbitrarily to impose closure in response to its alleged security needs and that the harsh retaliatory measures on the part of the Israeli Government would dangerously exacerbate the state of the Palestinian economy, resulting in greater hardship and despair among the Palestinian population.

The Israeli authorities pursue an arbitrary colonialist hegemonic policy in East Jerusalem, likened in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories submitted to the General Assembly, contained in document A/52/131/Add.2, to a policy of "ethnic cleansing". Here I would like to quote from the report:

> "The gravity of the situation in East Jerusalem is compounded further by the recent withdrawal on a massive scale of identity cards of Palestinian

> Jerusalemites. Witnesses who testified before the Special Committee have described this policy as amounting to a silent deportation or even ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem's Arab population, who are being treated as resident aliens. It is estimated that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites, who have to prove that the City is their 'centre of their life', are threatened with losing their residency rights, which has given rise to a pervasive feeling of insecurity among the population. This discriminatory policy, applied to the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem ... has, among other things, serious repercussions for health insurance, education, housing and freedom of movement. None of these apply to Israelis." (A/52/131/Add.2, p. 5)

Moreover, Israel's policies regarding Jerusalem resulted in violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, especially in the wake of the opening by Israel on 24 September 1996 of the so-called Western Wall Tunnel under the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first kiblah and the third holiest mosque in the Islamic world.

The international community should stand up to this Israeli challenge and intransigence, which are undermining the peace process in the Middle East. Arab acceptance of the principles of the peace process, anchored on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace, in no way implies acceptance of the current Israeli practice of Judaizing occupied Arab territory by building new settlements and expanding the existing ones, or of the attempts to Judaize the holy Arab city of Jerusalem and to obliterate its Arab and Islamic physical character through a fait accompli policy.

The States which signed the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are called upon to put pressure on Israel to implement the provisions of that Convention within the occupied Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem.

The Government of Saudi Arabia, which is the custodian of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, has accorded special, primordial importance to the peace process in the Middle East since its inception in Madrid, and throughout, until it reached the current crossroads. The Government of Saudi Arabia has provided all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their sufferings and help them fulfil their national aspirations in building their independent State on their national Palestinian soil. Along with Arab sister States, the Government of Saudi Arabia will continue to make its maximum efforts for the resumption of the peace process on all tracks, so that a just and lasting peace can be achieved in the Middle East, and so that the region may again enjoy the blessings bestowed upon it by God, the Almighty.

The international community, especially the two sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, namely, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as the European Union, is called upon to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to make them comply with the resolutions of international legality with regard to the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process.

We maintain that the expeditious resumption of the peace process on all tracks through the effective implementation of the Oslo accords, especially the 34 accords signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace through full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), are the viable road to ensuring the return of security to the region and its emergence from this state of freeze, tension and violence in order for the Middle East region to continue its rich contribution to the construction of world civilization.

I wish to close my remarks today by quoting from the Holy Koran:

> "On that account: We ordained
> For the Children of Israel
> That if any one slew
> A person — unless it be
> For murder for spreading
> Mischief in the land —
> It would be as if
> He slew the whole people:
> And if any one saved a life,
> It would be as if he saved
> The life of the whole people.
> Then although there came
> To them Our Apostles
> With Clear Signs, yet,
> Even after that, many
> Of them continued to commit
> Excesses in the land." [*The Holy Koran, V*]

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is considering this agenda item, "Question of Palestine", in the midst of special international and regional circumstances, characterized by the obvious frustration of the international community in general and the peoples of the Middle East in particular at the very dangerous impasse to which the peace track has come in the recent period.

The reason for this, as is known to all, is primarily the intransigent position adopted by the present Israeli Administration since its assumption of power. Indeed, the present Israeli Administration has endeavoured to undermine the bases of the peace process as a whole. To begin with, it has reneged on the primary principle on which the process, since the 1991 peace conference in Madrid, was based, namely, land for peace. In addition, the Israeli Administration has attempted to go back on its contractual commitments reached with the Palestinian side. Israel's negative position is characterized by a number of arbitrary and oppressive measures, such as its refusal to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, a measure that was clearly stipulated in all the agreements with the Palestinian National Authority. It has returned to a policy of Judaization and settlerism in Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in total contradiction of the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the international community, particularly those of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

This Israeli political approach is also made clear by the repressive measures taken by this Israeli Administration against the Palestinian people, such as the confiscation of land of Palestinians, the expropriation of their properties by a variety of means, including the use of force and duplicitous methods, forced displacement and the provocation of Palestinians by settlers, which is encouraged. The Israeli Administration is also adopting policies of collective punishment of Palestinian citizens, such as the closing off of Palestinian land and the imposition of economic siege.

As a result of this unacceptable approach, the hopes generated by the peace process have completely come to an end, and the prospects of peace which the peoples of the region and other peace-loving peoples aspired to have vanished. Consequently the climate of doubt even with regard to the feasibility of some of the positive steps that were supposed to accompany the peace process, particularly the regional economic conferences and the multilateral coordination meetings, has prevailed. This is the logic of the saying: "if the root is gone, the branch is no more". The logic of confrontation and violence is overshadowing the whole region, and threatening the peace and stability of all its peoples.

The situation in occupied Palestine would not have reached the present deteriorated stage had the international community been firm and determined in putting an end to Israeli continued violations of the international resolutions with regard to the question of the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. The inability of the Security Council to adopt a firm position with regard to these problems has led in one way or another to further transgressions by the Israeli Administration in pursuit of its objectionable policies. As a result, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was reconvened twice this year, which is clear evidence of the awareness of the international community of the dangers of the situation and of the need to confront the intransigence pursued by the Israeli Administration and to force it to comply with international legality.

This position was also clearly expressed when the General Assembly adopted by overwhelming majority a decision to convene a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

The responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people will remain as long as that people's case remains without a just and lasting solution that will guarantee their right to establish their own independent State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The solution to this problem, by its nature, must be part of a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question in its entirety. Any attempt to achieve just peace in the area must include the end of Israeli occupation in all Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 497 (1981) and 425 (1978). Algeria believes this is the only serious solution possible for the Israeli administration and that it would guarantee the return of Arab territories to their rightful owners, defuse the risk of war in the region and create a climate of confidence conducive to the establishment of a comprehensive, just, comprehensive and lasting peace that would ensure a peaceful life for all peoples of the region.

Mr. Samhan Al-Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, it is my pleasure to express

supporters. They now say they would adopt the Razali-framework draft resolution by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting — not by 124 votes, but by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting. It is common knowledge that whenever sensitive or very controversial issues are voted on here at the United Nations, more than a few countries act like Pontius Pilate: they wash their hands of the matter. They just abstain or happen not to be present at the crucial time. We checked, and we found that in the last couple of years, for example, at the moment of the vote on controversial draft resolutions, sometimes 40 or 50 delegations were not present. Moreover, a dozen or so Member States are not allowed to vote in the General Assembly, either for well-known reasons or because they have not paid their dues. In other words — and I want to draw attention to this because I think it is a crucial point — a reform of such relevance, of such magnitude as Security Council expansion could be approved by as few as 70, 80 or 90 votes, representing less than half the membership of the United Nations. This is what our opponents are asking. This is frankly unbelievable. It is unthinkable.

Turning to my third point, there can be little doubt that the only place where efforts can be made to bridge the sea of differences still existing on the issue of Security Council reform is within the Open-ended Working Group, in the light of day and for all to see. There, the Razali formula, with all its negative implications and consequences, can finally be put to rest once and for all. Two other major options should then be revisited and fully analysed in the Working Group, namely, rotation and/or increase only in non-permanent seats along the lines of the fall-back position of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Throughout the exercise of Security Council reform, my delegation has been guided by three main motivations: first, that of protecting my country's interests. Let us set the record straight. Everyone in this Hall promotes and is called on to promote his or her own national interests. I said last year, and I repeat now, that Italy, the fifth-largest producer of wealth in the world and soon to become the fifth-largest contributor to the United Nations regular budget, will never, never accept relegation to third- or fourth-class status.

Our second motivation is that of protecting a dream. Like many other Europeans, we Italians hope that in the not-too-distant future there can be a common European seat on the Security Council. Increasing the number of permanent members on the Council from the countries of the European Union would deal a setback to that dream rather than move it closer to reality.

Last but not least, we are motivated by the desire to protect the interests of the United Nations as a whole. Article 25 of the Charter provides that

> "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council".

Such an enormous and extraordinary delegation of power can be upheld only through trust and a system of accountability. The one true test of accountability in a democratic system is regular elections. The creation of new permanent members would exempt certain countries from the test of regular elections and therefore further erode the supremacy of the General Assembly. We must not allow this to happen. For, in the end, the General Assembly is and must remain the cornerstone of our Organization.

To conclude, as Foreign Minister Dini wrote yesterday in an article published simultaneously in *The International Herald Tribune*, the *General Anzeiger*, and *Corriere della Sera*:

> "Any reform, if it is to pass the scrutiny of national parliaments and public opinion, must produce real progress in terms of the credibility, democracy and authority of the most universal of world institutions." [International Herald Tribune, Editorial/Opinion pages, 3 December 1997]

In other words, it must reflect a Security Council of the future, not the Security Council of the past.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): The reform of the Security Council is an issue of vital importance which has far-reaching implications not only for the future of the Organization itself but for the health of international relations in the twenty-first century as well. Although four years of deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group have not yet led to general agreement on any specific formula for reform, they have identified the key issues of contention and enabled us to discern what lies at the heart of the divergence of views among Member States.

We all agree that the changes in international relations over the past several decades are of a nature that warrants expansion of Council membership.

Divergent views exist on the issue of how these changes can best be reflected in alterations of the composition of the Council and how a mechanism can be devised to ensure that the composition remains in line with future changes in international relations. We believe that this divergence of views can be resolved if the reform of the Council is based on an objective analysis of the problems and shortcomings of the Council's operations thus far.

The last half century has witnessed the emergence of a considerable number of nations endowed with significant power resources with which to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. We believe that the Security Council should be reformed in a way which ensures that these nations can serve in the Council with reasonable frequency, commensurate with their capabilities to contribute to international peace and security. In our view, this can best be done through an increase in the non-permanent category of Council membership alone, by providing for a mechanism under which those countries with distinguished capabilities to contribute to international security can be elected to Council membership with greater frequency or longer tenure than others.

The idea of creating five new permanent seats, two from the industrialized world and three from the developing world, has been afloat for some time now. Over the past five decades some Member States have come to acquire power resources which are comparable to those held by some of the current permanent members. We fully understand the aspirations of some of these countries to permanent membership. However, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership might actually create more problems than it solves.

Let me for the sake of clarity elaborate further on some of the problems we should expect to arise.

First of all, there seems to be no clear way to determine which countries are qualified for permanent membership and which are not. If any proposed expansion of permanent seats takes place, there are certain to be many other Member States that are not fortunate enough to be elected to new permanent membership but that are just as qualified in terms of power resources as those that do. This means that, in the name of eliminating the existing discrimination between current permanent members and aspirants to new permanent membership, we would actually end up creating an even worse system of discrimination that affects a greater number of countries. Those countries would feel marginalized and alienated as third-class Member States, and might well lose their incentive to make constructive contributions to the work of our Organization. Given the capability and willingness of these nations to make a meaningful contribution to international peace and security, this would be a setback to the health and vitality of the United Nations.

In the light of what takes place in the Security Council in terms of realpolitik, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership could further enhance the possibility of excluding the real issues affecting international peace and security from the purview of the Security Council. It would also undermine the efficiency of the Council in responding to conflict situations in a timely manner, because more time would be spent on working out differences among a large number of permanent members.

The virtual irreplaceability of permanent members, once they are elected, is yet another serious problem associated with the increase in permanent membership. If a one-time decision were to hold sway for all time, Member States would be forced to live for ever with the results of one fateful decision based on the international political realities at a fixed point in time, regardless of the dynamic evolution of international relations that might unfold in the future. The dynamics of international relations are such that in the future there could be other countries which catch up with or surpass the power resources of permanent members. A system of periodic review cannot properly address the problem of the growing gap between the composition of the Council and underlying international realities because new permanent members would be able to perpetuate their privileged status with the support of a mere one third of the general membership.

Apart from these problems, an increase in the ratio of Council members not regularly elected by — and thus not accountable to — the general membership would undermine the political legitimacy and credibility of the Council to act on behalf of the general membership. This is certainly not consistent with the vision which my Government holds for the Security Council in the twenty-first century.

Bearing these problems in mind, we strongly hope that common ground can be found which will enable us to transform the Security Council into a more representative, effective, efficient and democratic body. We will work closely with other interested Member States to work out a solution acceptable to the entire

membership. We will remain open-minded and flexible with regard to any constructive proposals which can move this important process in the right direction.

My delegation would like to say a word on the current under-representation of the Asian Group in the Security Council. As it stands, without counting permanent members, the Asian Group of 48 countries holds the same number of non-permanent seats as the 33-member Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the 24-country Group of Western European and other States. The Asian Group is the only regional group which has expanded in both membership and geographical coverage since the end of the cold war. Given the number of countries and other relevant factors, the Asian Group deserves at least as many non-permanent seats as the African Group in an expanded Council. Any formula that fails to address this problem will be neither fair nor just for the Asian Group.

Finally, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/52/L.7, we reaffirm our opposition to any imposed artificial time-frame for deliberations on this important issue and to any attempt to adopt in the General Assembly substantive decisions by less than a two-thirds majority of the entire membership.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.